

Letter from Taizé

Preparing for the world-wide Council of Youth

October 1973

Nothing is really grave, except the loss of love.

Discovering a living relationship with God...
contemplating him in the faces of others... restoring
a human face to those disfigured... all of that
is a single struggle : the struggle of love. Without
love, what is the good of believing ? Or of going
so far as to give our bodies to be burned in the
fire ?

No, as we struggle nothing is really grave,
except the loss of love.

Roger, your brother

« These last few months have been a time of discovery. Little by little, we have been growing aware of the river that is carrying us along. Since the preparation for the Council of Youth began, great numbers of us have been moving forward together, even without our knowing one another. Gradually our words and our lives have been converging on this year, when we found everybody with the same words on his lips : struggle, contemplation, communion.

Even since Easter, these words have never stopped resounding farther and deeper. Surely this is one of the first visible signs of that communion to which we are all aspiring ?

This river — carrying us and bearing us beyond everything we had imagined and wished for — is constantly being joined by other tributaries. It has flowed between two banks : on the one side, contemplation, on the other struggle. The river flows between the two and we are living from the essential link between struggle and contemplation : the love of the Risen Christ. Even if we do not yet see towards where the river is flowing, even when the banks appear hostile or too far away, or even too attractive. »

Appearing soon : sequel to *Festival...*, *STRUGGLE AND CONTEMPLATION*, by Br. Roger (S.P.C.K.).

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« STRUGGLE AND CONTEMPLATION TO BECOME
MEN AND WOMEN OF COMMUNION » :

Was announced at Easter this year. It is the meeting point where three years of preparing for the Council converge and at the same time the call to which we are trying to respond through our way of living.

It is the theme running through the international youth meetings, week by week in Taizé, and also, in the course of journeys made by young people, successively in Yahoundé and Nkongsamba (Cameroun) ; near New York ; Chosica (Peru) ; San Juan (Porto Rico) ; Sherbrooke (Canada) ; and Guadalajara (Mexico).

In these meetings, people everywhere are searching to get down to the sources, above all in the daily celebration of the Risen Christ, and how to reach out to the ultimate consequences of faith, in a commitment for mankind.

As the Archbishop of Canterbury commented during his visit to Taizé, from 28 September to 1st October : *« Next year the world-wide Council of Youth will begin. What will it be ? It is not a new organisation, not a new movement. Through the Council many young people like you will be helping the Church everywhere to become a caring Church... a Church that can forget itself, and pride, and power, and prosperity. »*

In Taizé, since Easter, four different approaches have been used to allow each person to get to the heart of the central theme from the angle which suited him the best. A series of questions was used to guide the progression of the group work and, in the course of the week, workshops were proposed for people interested in a particular problem or who wanted to experiment with other methods of working.

The four series of questions, like the titles proposed by participants for the workshops, evolved as the weeks went by. Here is how they appeared at the end of the summer :

The questions

1. *Living against the stream*

What situations demand that I live against the stream? What conditioning elements do I feel called on to free myself from (milieu, culture, thought-patterns)? What prevents me living fully? What risks am I ready to take in reacting against what society proposes? What is it worth giving one's life for? How do I struggle, how do I live contemplation, in such a way as to become a sign of contradiction according to the Gospel?

2. *Contemplation : a renewed way of looking*

In what sense does contemplation change the way I look at men and events (own life, society, politics...)?

To what extent can I say that contemplation is both inner struggle and entrusting all to Christ?

How does contemplation commit me to struggling for the liberation of others?

3. *Struggle alongside the victims of exploitation*

Who, in my situation, is man oppressed and exploited, close at hand and far away? What systems make him a victim? Analysis of life-situations (country, school, family, work, etc.).

In my ordinary daily life, what ways have I of struggling for mutual liberation : my own and other peoples'?

So as to struggle thus, how to open myself to being so changed as to see both men and the universe with the eyes of Christ himself? How to live contemplation in the heart of this struggle?

4. *Becoming men and women of communion*

Where do I find difficulty in the communion with God, with others, with myself? Analysis of actual experiences. How to struggle actively against all the things in my life that go against this communion and threaten it? How does contemplation open a way for me to pass through conflicts?

In this search for a communion (with God, with others, with myself) how to keep passing beyond seeming limits as they occur, awakening unsuspected capacities in myself, finding hitherto unknown ways of communion?

Workshops

Signs of resurrection that herald a new world : where can these be recognised today, how can they be lived ?

Struggling alongside the poor, making decisions with them, so as to create a society of sharing :

- in industry and agriculture, two elements of production (trade unions, parties, action groups) ;
- in the local community (party, community development, youth clubs, housing trust, community).

The information media : instruments of alienation ? of struggle ? of communication ?

Learning to look (art, nature, man).

A process of mutual liberation : how can this be lived between Third World countries and the others ?

Contemplation in daily life.

Christians and Moslems : discovering that we are linked in our struggles and in our faith.

Consumer society and poverty of life style.

Living in groups, cells, and communities..

Involvement in trade unionism : how ? in what perspective ?

Imagining forms of community prayer for everyday life.

Immigration and emigration as essential traits of capitalist development.

Bible study on the theme : becoming men of communion.

Expression through theatre, mime, improvisation...

Popular schools : means of conscientisation for the liberation of the oppressed.
Discussion on prayer.

Fidelity in a life commitment.

Meeting with Palestinian participants.

Why study ? for which society ? for which man ?

The Church today : living forms of visible communion.

Social workers : for whom are we working ? serving powers that be or in view of a mutual liberation ?

Married couples : becoming signs of contradiction.

Diversity of political choice among Christians and communion in the Church.

As we move step by step towards the Council of Youth, there are new questions which come up each year. Here are some of them :

ANALYSING SITUATIONS WHERE MAN IS EXPLOITED

« Some people in the meetings have insisted on the importance of making a global analysis of the economic systems in which we are living.

When we discover certain aspects of injustice, it is easy to become involved in some well defined local action : literacy work, community development projects, and so on... But all the different situations in which man is being exploited are linked together by economic and sociological laws : if you only take care of one wound, the whole body cannot be healed. This is why it is important to understand the laws that govern our societies so as to be able to analyse particular situations and to see how a commitment on the local level can find its place in the context of the struggle of all those everywhere who are being exploited.

However, this does not mean getting hold of a ready made analysis and systematically forcing it on every reality we meet. What it does mean is finding help, through other people's discoveries, in slowly building up one's own method of analysis and testing it through confrontation with reality.»

BELIEVER AND NON-BELIEVER

« When we set out on the adventure of a Council of Youth, it was quite clear in our minds that our hope for a new communion among all men was to be found in the Risen Christ. It is from this hope in Christ that all our attempts at involvement for and with mankind have taken shape over the last three years.

Yet through our searching and our listening, we have often met people who had not at all accepted Christ as the basis of their lives. This poses some pretty vital questions for us. We refuse to consider these people as second class participants in the Council.

We are quite convinced that God places something unique in every man and the non-believer's presence can sometimes speak to our hearts like a messenger of God. But how can we avoid the non-believer feeling that he is being recuperated for our ends?

How can we live the adventure of the Council all together in a visible communion, while never hesitating to pronounce the name of Christ with a voice that is joyful? »

LIVING IN COMMUNION

In the course of the meetings, there arose the question of channels of communication :

« During a meeting, and in the whole of the preparation for the Council, while avoiding structures like those of a movement or a parliamentary system, how can adequate channels of communication between everyone be found? What are the channels of communication that correspond to the reality of what we are trying to live : a communion, the communion of the people of God on the march ; where nobody is up on a pyramid but where everyone is participating in a common creation? »

Still another question. The reality of this communion is obliging us to reconcile two necessities both of which are essential, yet which very often appear to be irreconcilable : on the one hand, making everybody welcome, without conditions, even those who are least motivated ; on the other, the necessity, so as to keep moving forward, of bringing together people who are really committed in struggle as in contemplation, and who know why they are committed.

FINDING A NEW LANGUAGE

« Imagining the Council of Youth does not mean just inventing situations or possibilities for the future in a vacuum.

When the imagination of youth is described as the source of renewal, this really means the imagination of those who are truly committed, and whose capacity for invention springs from experience lived out in the thick of the struggle. These are the people who can really change the world, rather than those whose theories just come from books.

Words can form a whole language that is quite divorced from reality and they can be used without committing the person who uses them, just like a system. I am sure this is true for many people who seem to have lost their capacity for imagination and invention.

Furthermore, words bear the marks of culture and so do not have the same meaning for everybody. So how can the "understanding barrier" be overcome and new ways of communication between us be found ? »

Just out : *DARE TO LIVE* — Preparing for the Worldwide Council of Youth, Paperback, S.P.C.K., Holy Trinity Church, Marylebone Road, London NW1 4DU.

Taking these language problems into account, as a commentary on this year's four themes, what better can be found than images taken from life? They stimulate reflexion and commitment better than abstract ideas can...

Living against the stream

(thorns)

« A few days ago, I was walking in the fields and I asked myself the question : But really, what does living against the stream mean? All kinds of words and ideas came to mind but none of them seemed to fit very well. Finally, I thought of an image suggested by my own country.

I imagined somebody at home in Africa, making his way slowly through the forest, not quite sure where he was going. There was no road, for it was the bush and he had to step his way through thorns. The going was hard and he was having trouble, yet he kept on... and on... convinced that he would come to a clearing... »

« I am trying to live out my commitment as an efficient shop steward in a situation where just everything is waiting to be done. We have got to develop and emphasise a basic solidarity between workers, but we are divided by conditions and salaries and background.

Each worker has only one worry : how to build his own house and furnish it himself... the one thought is how to get on with the construction which means neglecting their families and creating still more problems. Nearly everybody is earning 2,000 F. Unfortunately, we accept shift work. Added to this, there are steam pressure leaks that cause deafness and chemicals that poison slowly...

The real struggle is to inform the men and make them aware of what is going on ; making union branches more dynamic and setting up new ones in the smaller factories... There, working conditions mean sixty hours one week and out of work a month later ; working in mud or water or in stinking fuel magma in an incredible din ; of course, the worst off are the immigrants. Under such conditions a man is worn out by 50.

What worries me most in all this is how we resign ourselves to it and let ourselves be caught by the system. It is unbelievably difficult to be a militant, to know how to look at the others and love them, to see injustices and help others break free of them, to develop some kind of solidarity. Can we make it ? We have begun doing this in our group, but it is slow.

Young workers do not expect anything from other young people. How can this kind of separation and indifference be overcome ? »

Contemplation : renewal of our way of looking

(signs of resurrection)

« To give your life is not something that you decide just like that, for fun - and not out of a sense of duty, either.

It is more a matter of letting your life be taken : in the heart of committed living — for an ideal or for what we believe — our life somehow slips away from us, bit by bit.

What I believe is that Christ today rises from the dead in every suffering person, in every situation of oppression, and by living the love with which we are loved by Christ we come to be able to change our world. Giving my life, letting it be taken, has meant and still means recognising, through the gropings of prayer and action, that Christ is my life's centre and that outside of his love I can no longer live. None of that has brought me to go preaching on the streets, or to any really extraordinary actions, but the way I see, relate to, react towards things and people and events has altered. Loving means never despairing of somebody or of a situation, it means seeing in such a way that no one is condemned or rejected.

That is what contemplation means for me. A way of living my daily life with the attitude of confidence, of real hope, turned towards the love of Christ ; my life and everything considered with love. I might almost use the word tenderness, especially in conflicts. Such an attitude is the exact opposite of neutral observing without involvement. By it I am summoned to find out more and more who I really am, what I really think, what I want, so as to be capable of loving the others as they are in fact : contemplative looking by which to live, with hearts reconciled, our struggle for love.»

« Where today can we recognise, and how to make of our lives signs of resurrection announcing a new world ? » Such was the question asked in one group.

In the present-day world, these signs exist, if we only know how to see them. It is not a matter of world-shaking events, of the great miracle, but in each day the Kingdom comes. When men ask Christ "Are you the liberator who is to come?" or try to believe, Christ invites them to turn to their own experience and the world around them and to discern the reality of the change.

Certain men are the clear, vivid expression of something lived by the whole people whom they represent : many of the bishops of Brazil, Julius Nyerere ... Surely this is a sign of the active presence of the risen Christ ?

The resurrection is not something we can take hold of, it is something we experience as a stream of life and a work of love. And the result is that we really see it at work only in people who day after day risk something : people who, having made a choice, live it out to the full. Even if it is not their whole existence that is immediately threatened, at least their professional success or their personal quiet often have to go by the board.

A worker who finds himself involved in a kind of resurrection with all the others in his factory : the workers, after years of victimisation, have become aware of their strength and they are now in charge of the whole enterprise — each one has a share in all the decisions that are taken.

Where there is suffering, the resurrection is not an answer, a solution . at the heart of our confrontation with suffering and death it is the reality by which we are enabled to create a communion in hope.»

Struggle with the victims of exploitation

(the tree of injustice)

« Latin America is a vast continent, with a history of four centuries. Before then, we were indians and the indian house is without door or window — the house and the heart, both alike open so that all can see what lies within. But then arrived the colonizers. They taught that houses should be shut, that we needed curtains, doors, walls around. And they taught that land was the property of some men and not of others.

The form of South America is like that of a heart ; now the heart is divided into different countries, and the people into different classes : those owning the land, those without land. And these centuries of division, of oppression have forced the man of the people, be he worker or peasant, to have four faces.

The first face, anyone can know — it is the face you encounter in the street, talking to people, at the market, buying pineapples or bananas...

The second face is only known to a few : a man's wife, his children, a few friends. To get know this face you have to have planted corn with a man, have lived through a strike together, gone through difficult times, you have to have built a house together.

As for the third face, a man's wife may glimpse it once or twice in a lifetime, at crucial moments, or may never see it.

And the fourth face is known only to the man himself. And I am sure that it is the face that talks with God, that God knows, that cannot be hidden from him.

These four faces have nothing to do with hypocrisy ; they have been shaped by four centuries of blood and violence. For us, to be "drunk with the message of Christ's liberating power" means staying very close to the people

and living the risen Christ with the men of the people so as to put an end to these different faces. If we are to be a sign of liberation, then private ownership has to be brought to an end so that the land and the factories can belong to those who work them.»

« People ask : what will the Council of Youth be ? And when I look at things more, I reckon : the Creator put a seed in man ; and he left it a lot up to us to cultivate the seed so as to see it grow up into a great tree.

In our days people have spent so much effort on cultivating the tree of injustice, it has become huge and it lets fall its fruit all over the place. When it is a matter of wars, people dying of hunger, selfishness, oppression, I think of the fruit of that tree. And each of us, in one way or another, is part of this system that crushes men down. I think of how much energy we have when it comes to helping the tree of injustice grow, then it gives bad fruit that people everywhere are eating and become ill from eating.

And supposing that today, for once, we had a chance of gathering together the seed that there is in us : of justice, of generosity and peace ! Suppose that we were to plant the tree together, and look after it, giving all our life to helping it grow ! Then, instead of people having to eat the fruit of the tree of injustice, there would also be the fruit of the tree of justice for them to eat. But it is hard, because if we are going to struggle in that direction, then each of us has to be converted to it personally.

If you are from Europe, then you do not have to come to us in Africa, or go to South America, in order to try and uproot the tree of injustice. If you do come, it is more a way of discovering how far afield the fruits have fallen. But afterwards, it is at the foot of the trunk that the uprooting has to be done. It means discovering, where we live, how we are involved in feeding that tree, how we are links in a chain of oppression. Then wherever each of us is, unbinding the chain, no longer watering a root, so that others in turn can be unbound. »

Becoming men and women of communion

(the feast)

« How, when the Council of Youth opens, to express in clear terms the things which so many young people sense about a new face for the Church and changes to be introduced in society, without turning into a pressure group thirsting for power? Amongst many others, I see one feature that seems to characterise the new face of the Church : poverty, and that particularly meaning an end to authority being exercised as a power over other people. It looks as though a conversion has to occur for the words of Christ to become a reality : "The heads of nations command as masters. It must not be so amongst you". But that is valid for all of us. How to find a way of saying clearly the hope, the expectancy alive within us without looking for ways of imposing our vision of things, but without simply uttering platitudes undaringly? Is there not some possibility of giving the word to the dumb? Instead of us being a minority expressing our views, could we not go to encounter the people who in the normal course of events have no chance to speak, or who do not know how to speak up, and listen at length to what they say with the firm determination to be the first to respond to their expectations, so as to give them at last a voice, and one that can be heard? »

« During this last year of preparation for the Council of Youth, the main thing is to be watchful and to pray, so as to be ready. To have confidence in this event of God within us, waiting with hopefulness. Such waiting presupposes a communion with Christ so as to overcome our personal barriers of race and culture.

Just as in the Parable of Christ about the Feast, of all those who have been invited many are sure not to come or to be not quite ready : some because of all their theorising, others because they never thought it something worth committing themselves to...

And now we have to join with the poorest, all the people who are already living the things we are searching for, but who are never talked about, so as to share this feast together.

The Council of Youth will be a communion happening with poor means between poor people : people who have understood that giving one's life means losing it so as to give it to others, people open to a dimension of world-wide universal communion.»

THE NEXT MEETINGS AT TAIZÉ

At Christmas, five meetings :

from Saturday 22 to Wednesday 26 December ; from Saturday 22 to Sunday 30 December ; from Wednesday 26 to Sunday 30 December ; from Saturday 29 December to Wednesday 2 January ; from Wednesday 2 January to Sunday 6 January.

The weekends of *November, December* and *January* are specially reserved for families (there is a kindergarten).

Silent Retreats : Throughout the winter, during the meetings and when there are none, people can come to Taizé to live several days of silence and solitude.

Age : 18 to 29 years old. — *Cost* : depending on your possibilities ; from 90p UK, 2 dollars USA, per day. — *Lodging* : in heated dormitories (bring blankets)

Registration to be sent to : MEETINGS, 71460 - Taizé-Community, France.

(It will be registered, you will not receive any acknowledgment.)

Name :

First Name :

Address

(with zip-code and country)

Profession : Age :

Will take part in the meeting from to

Has already taken part in a meeting at Taizé : Yes-No

Can undertake simultaneous translation from into